



EATING DISORDERS

WHAT ARE EATING DISORDERS?

An eating disorder is a complex mental illness characterised by disturbed eating behaviours and extreme concerns about food and eating, as well as body size, shape, and/or weight.

Eating disorders are characterized by an overwhelming, consuming drive to be thin and a morbid fear of gaining weight and losing control over eating.

There can be serious physical and emotional impacts associated with an eating disorder, including increased risk of malnutrition, complications with other medical conditions, and death.

COMMON TYPES OF EATING DISORDERS

Anorexia Nervosa

People with anorexia nervosa possess an intense fear of gaining weight and often have a distorted body image in which they see themselves as fat, despite often being underweight. As such, they may place severe restrictions on the amount and type of food they consume, create extreme exercise routines, purge through use of laxatives and/or habitual vomiting after eating, all in an effort to control and lose weight. Such extreme efforts to lose weight, even when underweight, can lead to severe health problems relating to malnutrition, and sometimes to the point of fatal self-starvation.

Bulimia Nervosa

People with bulimia experience repeated episodes of binge eating - consuming large amounts of food, followed by compensatory efforts to rid themselves of the food/calories, such as purging through vomiting or use of laxatives, and/or excessive exercise. People with bulimia often feel a lack of control over their bingeing and purging, are typically preoccupied with their body weight and shape, and are often close to their normal body weight or even slightly overweight.

Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

People with binge eating disorder (BED) frequently go through episodes of bingeing - consuming very large quantities of food, even when they are not hungry, and may continue eating even long after being full. After a binge, they may feel guilt or shame over the amount of food eaten. However, unlike with bulimia nervosa or anorexia nervosa, people with BED do not purge their food after bingeing.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

PHYSICAL

- Fluctuations in weight or rapid weight loss/gain
- Fatigue, dizziness, difficulty concentrating
- Increased sensitivity to cold weather
- Irregular/disrupted menstrual cycles

EMOTIONAL

- Obsessive thoughts about food, body size, shape or weight
- Mood changes: increased irritability, stress, anxiety, depression
- Feelings of low self-esteem
- Feelings of anxiety during meal times

BEHAVIOURAL

- Eating food in smaller or larger amounts than normal
- Excessive dieting - obsessive calorie counting, frequent and long periods of fasting, skipping meals
- Binge eating, using food as a way to deal with boredom or stress
- Purging/vomiting after eating
- Eating in private or avoiding social situations involving food
- Excessive exercising

EFFECTS OF EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders can affect the mind and body in a multitude of ways:

Mouth

erosion of dental enamel, swollen jaw, bad breath, gum disease, tooth decay

Throat/ Oesophagus

chronic sore throat, indigestion, heartburn, reflux, inflamed or rupture of oesophagus

Heart

irregular or slow heartbeat, cardiac arrest, heart failure, low blood pressure, fainting, dizziness

Stomach & intestines

ulcers, pain, stomach rupture, bowel problems, constipation, diarrhoea, cramps

Hormones

irregular or absent periods, loss of libido, infertility

Kidneys

dehydration

Psychological

preoccupation with food and weight, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression

Skin

calluses on knuckles, dry skin

Muscles

fatigue, cramps caused by electrolyte imbalance, tiredness, lethargy

GETTING HELP



Nutritional Management

Nutritional management is provided by a dietitian and focuses on creating normal eating patterns. It aims to address fears about food and loss/gain of weight, and to offer nutritional advice, construct an eating plan, and provide motivation.



Family approaches

Family approaches are most common among youth suffering from eating disorder. This treatment focuses on involving the whole family as a support network for the person with the disorder. The aim is to treat the person while at the same time offering support and information to family members on how to provide appropriate care.



Support Groups

Support groups can provide a wealth of support and information, from people with similar experiences. It is a great place to access referrals for early intervention and eating disorder prevention.



Psychotherapy

There are various types psychotherapy treatments for eating disorders, which focus on a person's thoughts, emotions, and pattern of thinking. Cognitive behavioural therapy is the most common model which aims to adjust unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaviour.



Inpatient Program

Inpatient treatment clinics provide 24-hour care and are usually located in hospitals and private treatment centres. The program aims to achieve medical stabilisations as well as weight restoration.



Outpatient Program

Outpatient services normally involve input from a range of health professionals such as dietitian, nutritionist or a general practitioner.

Supported by:



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